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Orations of Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm in the Aftermath of Ḥusayn's Martyrdom at Karbala: Speaking Truth to Power

Tahera Qutbuddin

Within early Islam's historical records, numerous orations by male leaders challenge political power from a rhetorical position of strength and lucidity.[1] But a handful of orations set against the grain of society's mores, attributed in circumstances of war and violence to a few women, such as Zaynab (d. ca. 62 AH/682 AD) and Umm Kulthūm (fl. mid-first/seventh century), showcase equal claim to eloquence and courage.[2]

Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm are well-known figures in the history of Islam.[3] Their grandfather was the Prophet Muḥammad; their mother, his daughter, Fāṭima al-Zahrā'; and their father the first Shi'a Imam and fourth Sunni caliph 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. Their brothers were the next two Shi'a Imams Ḥasan and Ḥusayn. Against the backdrop of this pedigree, these women are celebrated by Muslims for their role supporting Husayn at the time of his martyrdom, and for protecting his family in the ensuing months in Umayyad captivity; they are also widely lauded for their passionate speeches narrating the injustices and suffering sustained in Karbala.[4]

1 Read more on various aspects of oration in the early Islamic period in Tahera Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration: Art and Function*, in the series *Handbook of Oriental Studies*, Section 1: *Near and Middle East*, series ed. Maribel Fierro et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

2 For more on women's orations and their distinctive features, see Qutbuddin, "Women's Orations: Kinship-Based Authority and Silence-Breaking Trauma," in *Arabic Oration*, 383–405.

3 On Zaynab, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "Zaynab bint 'Alī," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed., ed. L. Jones (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 14:9937–39, which also lists studies on sources for Zaynab's biography; see also Muḥsin al-Amīn, ed., *A'yān al-shī'a* (Beirut: Dār al-Ta'āruf, 1983), 7:137–42. On Umm Kulthūm, see Amīn, *A'yān al-shī'a*, 3:484–87; I have found no expositions on her in Western languages. Both Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm feature in primary sources discussing the Battle of Karbala (see references in n. 6 and n. 7).

4 In Muḥarram orations, and lamentation poetry composed in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, and other languages through the centuries, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm are portrayed as compassionate saints and powerful intercessors. For an insightful assessment of Zaynab's depiction in contemporary Karbala narratives, see Abir Hamdar, "Jihad of Words: Gender and Contemporary Karbala Narratives," *The Yearbook of English Studies: Literature and Religion* 39, no. 1/2 (2009): 84–100. According to Shi'a poets and writers, Zaynab is the preeminent female orator of Islam (*khaṭībat al-Islām*). In the Iranian revolution of 1979, female commandos came to be known as "the commandos of her holiness Zaynab." For her status, see, e.g., David Pinault, "Zaynab bint 'Alī and the Place of the Women of the Households of the First Imāms in Shi'ite Devotional Literature," in *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety*, ed. G. Hambly (New York, 1998), 69–98; Diane D'Souza, "The Figure of Zaynab in Shī'ī Devotional Life," *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies*17, no. 1 (1998): 31–53; and Edith Szanto, "Sayyida Zaynab in the State of Exception: Shi'i Sainthood as 'Qualified Life' in Contemporary Syria," *International Journal*

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Set against the narrative of events outlined in the historical sources (on which more shortly), the speeches emphasize the sisters' bravery in the face of overwhelming odds. Their situation is shown as fraught and fragile: they are portrayed as captive and shackled, having undergone physical and emotional trauma, and the loss of their brother and all their male family members in horrific conditions. Yet, they are also shown professing complete certainty in the right to speak and be heard, making ample use of persuasive language and reasoning in proclaiming their rectitude.

In this article, I translate and annotate Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm's orations delivered in the aftermath of Ḥusayn's martyrdom at Karbala in the courts of Kufa and Damascus from texts presented in the earliest extant written source of the third/ninth century.[5] Since all speeches from the time were initially orally transmitted, their historicity remains an open question, and this reservation should be kept in mind while reading the texts at hand. But, as I discuss in brief later in this article and argue in detail in *Arabic Oration*, it is conceivable in view of their early and wide provenance that they contain an authentic core of themes, citations, and even some original language from an actual past event. My analysis of the speeches attributed to Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm—their oral aesthetics, their historical and literary contexts, and their setting of trauma—highlights unique features of female Arabic oratory in early Islam. While scholars have shown that trauma often silences the female voice, we find that in this case, in contrast, the Prophetic-lineage-based authority of our female orators, asserted in the martyrdom context of their orations, produces a resounding breaking of the silence.

Summary of the Karbala Killing of Husayn and Its Aftermath

The first detailed source on the Karbala tragedy is the *Maqtal Ḥusayn* (The killing of Ḥusayn), a compilation of reports by the Kufan author Abū Mikhnaf (d. 157/774) citing his grandfather, a contemporary to the events, who, in turn, had collected the reports from eyewitnesses of Karbala. Abū Mikhnaf's book is lost, but its content is preserved in some of our earliest historical sources, including the works of Balādhurī (d. 279/892), Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī (d. 314/926), Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih (d. 328/940), Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān (d. 363/974), Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī (d. ca. 363/972), and al-Ṣadūq al-Qummī (d. 381/991).[6] An array of later Shiʿa writings are based on these and other lost sources.

of Middle East Studies 44 (2012): 285–99. Youtube performances of Zaynab's Damascus oration include Anon., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bM_bNxjkzxg (Munaẓẓamat Ahl al-Bayt al-Islāmiyya, 2007, Arabic with English subtitles), Anon., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-vAhilDzmlC4 (2011, Urdu); Isha Sadiq Haider, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YqRp1Md-VdiY (2015, Urdu); Ammar Nakshwani, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=asY5_bC3whY (2013, English); and Nadeem Sarwar (London: Ahlebait TV, 2013, Urdu), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2fxqOOVIRro (accessed July 17, 2017).

5 Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr, *Balāghāt al-nisāʾ wa-ṭarāʾif kalāmihinn wa-mulaḥ nawādirihinn wa-akhbār dhawāt al-raʾy minhunn wa-ashʿārihinn fī l-jāhiliyyah wa-ṣadr al-Islām*, ed. ʿA. Hindāwī (Cairo: Dār al-Faḍīla, 1998), 70–77.

6 On the Battle of Karbala, its lead-up and its aftermath, see Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa-l-mulūk*, ed. M. A. Ibrāhīm, 10 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1960–69), 5:347–470, 5:551–63, 5:569–82, 6:7–116; translated as *The History of al-Tabari*, ed. E. Yarshater, 39 vols. + in-

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They include the histories of Iraqi author Mufīd (d. 413/1022), the historians Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/1266) and Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī (d. 654/1256), the Yemeni Ṭayyibī Dāʿī Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn (d. 872/1468), and Iranian Safavid Twelver encyclopedist Muḥammad Bāqir Majlisī (d. 1110/1699).[7] The following summary of events, which will provide context to the subsequent analysis of Zaynab's and Umm Kulthūm's orations, is based mostly on reports from the earliest third-fourth/ninth-tenth-century histories, with a few points taken from the later sources listed above:

In 60/680, the Umayyad caliph Muʿāwiya died in Damascus, having appointed his son Yazīd to the caliphate. The governance of the Muslim community up to that point—after Muḥammad's death in 11/632—is too complicated to go into here, but suffice it to say there were fierce and continuing divisions regarding the Prophet's succession.[8] Ḥusayn's father ʿAlī (d. 40/661) and his brother Ḥasan (d. 49/669) had both maintained their right to lead.[9] So too now did Ḥusayn, who resisted pressure to pledge allegiance to Yazīd from the Umayyad governor in Medina, and set off for the safe haven of Mecca. There, over the next few months, he received letters from numerous nobles of Kufa, who denounced Yazīd as an immoral usurper and invited Ḥusayn to come to Iraq as their imam. Ḥusayn

dex (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989–2007), vol. 19 trans. I. K. A. Howard as *The Caliphate of Yazīd b. Muʿāwiyah*, 1–183, vol. 20 trans. G. R. Hawting as *The Collapse of Sufyānid Authority and the Coming of the Marwānids*, 80–97, 105–22, 182–25, vol. 21 trans. M. Fishbein as *The Victory of the Marwānids*, 1–118; Aḥmad ibn Yaḥyā al-Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, vol. 2, ed. M. F. al-ʿAẓm with Ṣ. N. al-Māradīnī (Damascus: Dār al-Yaqaẓa al-ʿArabiyya, 1996), 453–520; al-Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān ibn Muḥammad, *Sharḥ al-akhbār fī faḍāʾil al-aʾimma al-aṭhār*, 16 parts in 4 vols. (Qum: Muʿassasat al-Nashr al-Islāmī, 1412/1991), 3:134–200; Aḥmad Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, ed. ʿA. Shīrī, 8 vols. + index (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwāʾ, 1991), 4:318–53, 5:5–173, 6:209–95; Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 6 vols. + index (Beirut: Dār Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, 1999), 4:352–61, 355–66, 377–79; Ibn Bābawayh al-Ṣadūq al-Qummī, *Amālī l-Ṣadūq*, (Najaf, al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥaydariyya, 1970), 133–48, sections 30–31; Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. A. Ṣaqr (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, 1998), 84–121. For a succinct biography of Ḥusayn, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "Husayn b. ʿAli (626–80)," in *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Islamic Political Thought,* ed. G. Bowering et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 227–28, where primary sources and further studies are listed.

7 Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Mufīd, *al-Irshād fī maʿrifat ḥujaj Allāh ʿalā l-ʿibād*, 2 vols. (Beirut: Muʾassasat Āl al-Bayt li Iḥyāʾ al-Turāth, 2008), 2:27–135; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Malhūf ʿalā qatlā l-ṭufūf*, ed. F. T. al-Ḥassūn (Qum: Dār al-Uswa, 1417/1996), entire vol.; Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm's orations are cited on 192–93, 215–18; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirat al-khawwāṣṣ* (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥaydariyya, 1964), 232–92; Idrīs ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār wa-funūn al-āthār fī dhikr al-nabī al-muṣṭafā l-mukhtār wa-waṣiyyihi ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib qātil al-kuffār wa-ālihimā l-aʾimma al-aṭhār ʿalayhim ṣalawāt Allāh al-ʿazīz al-ghaffār*: ed. A. Chleilat, M. Fakhoury, Y. S. Fattoum, M. Sagherji, and A. F. Sayyid, 7 vols. (London and Damascus: Institut français du Proche-Orient and The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2007–10), 4:159–65, 172–73; Muḥammad Bāqir al-Majlisī, *Biḥār al-anwār* [*al-jāmiʿa li-durar akhbār al-aʾimma al-aṭhār*], 110 vols. (Tehran: Dār al-Kutub al-Islāmiyya, 1956–74), 44:174–394, 45:1–409 (entire vol.; Zaynab's Damascus oration cited in 45:133–35).

8 For details, see, e.g., works by Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muḥammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Asma Afsaruddin, *Excellence and Precedence: Medieval Islamic Discourse on Legitimate Leadership* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), supporting, respectively, the Shiʿa and Sunni narratives.

9 Ḥasan abdicated, while stipulating that Muʿāwiyah would not have the right to appoint a successor.

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sent his cousin Muslim ibn ʿAqīl as emissary to receive their pledge of allegiance, and then headed out himself with his family and supporters. Zaynab accompanied him, in some reports with her sons ʿAwn and Muḥammad, as did Umm Kulthūm. Both sisters were then a little over fifty years of age.

It is reported that as Ḥusayn was leaving Mecca, Muslims from distant lands were arriving for the beginning of the Ḥajj pilgrimage. Among them was the Kufan poet Farazdaq, who intoned to Ḥusayn in ominous portent, "Their hearts are with you, but their swords are raised against you."[10] When Muslim ibn ʿAqīl arrived in Kufa, ten thousand initially pledged allegiance. Alarmed, Yazīd directed ʿUbaydallāh ibn Ziyād, then governor of neighboring Basra, to proceed to Kufa and contain the situation. Ibn Ziyād captured and executed Muslim ibn ʿAqīl, and Hāniʾ ibn ʿUrwa who had sheltered him, and later a second emissary Qays ibn Mushir, while the Kufans watched in fear. He then recruited a Kufan military unit to confront Ḥusayn, which included many of Ḥusayn's former supporters.

Ibn Ziyād's army surrounded Ḥusayn's small entourage of ninety men, women, and children en route to Kufa, at Karbala. The numbers of the Umayyad force swelled as the days went by and reinforcements arrived, again from Kufa; some reports say the final count numbered four, some say ten, while others say twenty-two thousand men. On 7 Muḥarram 61/680, they blocked Ḥusayn's access to water.[11] For the next three days, they forced Ḥusayn's company to endure the scorching heat of the Arabian desert without food or drink. On 10 Muḥarram, the day named ʿĀshūrāʾ, they killed Ḥusayn and all but one of the men. Those killed from among Ḥusayn's supporters were reported to be seventy-two in number, including eighteen family members, among them his brothers, sons (including an infant), and nephews. They included ʿAwn and Muḥammad, who, according to some accounts, were encouraged by their mother to fight in defense of their uncle. The seventy-two would be hailed as martyrs by later generations of Muslims, and Ḥusayn himself would become famous in Shiʿa lore as "Prince of Martyrs" (*sayyid al-shuhadāʾ*). Ḥusayn's twenty-three-year-old son ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn was ill and had stayed back from

10 (قلوب الناس معك وأسيافهم عليك), and close variant readings. Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, 5:71; Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *al-ʿIqd al-farīd*, 4:360; Mufīd, *Irshād*, 2:67.

11 According to historical reports, denying water seems to have been a standard tactic employed by Yazīd's Umayyad forebears against Ḥusayn's Hāshimid forebears. In diametric opposition, the Hāshimids are reported to have generously and honorably given the Umayyads water during the same set of events, even though withholding it would have aided their military cause: Yazīd's forebear, ʿAbd Shams, denied water to Ḥusayn's forebear, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, in a journey taken during an arbitration conflict; ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib had given ʿAbd Shams water earlier in the same journey when he was thirsty. Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad al-Maydānī, *Majmaʿ al-amthāl*, ed. J. ʿA. Tūmā, 4 vols. (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2002), 1:158–59. Yazīd's father Muʿāwiya denied water to Ḥusayn's father ʿAlī at the outset of the Battle of Ṣiffīn; when ʿAlī's army wrested control of the river from Muʿāwiya, he allowed Muʿāwiya's army to continue to have access. Naṣr b. Muzāḥim al-Minqarī, *Waqʿat Ṣiffīn*, ed. ʿA. Hārūn (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1981), 157–93; Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, 3:5–19. In Karbala, Yazīd's army denied water to Ḥusayn; earlier, when Yazid's vanguard had surrounded Ḥusayn in Bīḍa, Ḥusayn had offered water to the Umayyads and their horses (Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5:401, 412; Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, 5:91–92).

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the fighting; he was the sole surviving adult male and, according to the majority Shiʿa denominations, he became the next Imam.[12]

After the massacre, the Umayyad army looted and burned Ḥusayn's camp and set off with the women and children for the court of Ibn Ziyād. According to some reports, the women were dishonored and ogled, their robes and jewelry were plundered, and they were placed on unsaddled camels. The narratives depict children bound with ropes around their necks, and Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, barefoot and in irons, made to lead the caravan across the burning sands. Entering Kufa, Zaynab, Umm Kulthūm, and the rest of the women were paraded unveiled through the town in which they had lived for four years under their father's rule. The heads of Ḥusayn and his companions were raised on spears beside them. The bustling, open market space in Kufa, as the prisoners were carried to the governor's palace, is the setting of our first oration by Umm Kulthūm. Ibn Ziyād then dispatched the prisoners to the court of the Umayyad caliph, where they faced further trials. The family remained incarcerated in Damascus for a time; the sources do not specify the number of days or months. It is said that they held the first assembly of mourning for Ḥusayn there. The court of Damascus, where the prisoners were lined up in front of Yazīd, is the setting of our second oration by Zaynab.

After a period of imprisonment, the family was released and allowed to return home to Medina. The sources state that Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm, as well as Ḥusayn's wives Shehr Bānū and Rabāb, and in some reports his young daughter Sakīna, died heartbroken within the next two to three years. On the other side, Yazīd, too, died young at forty years of age, a mere three years after the incident at Karbala. With the sudden death of Yazīd's son and successor a month later, the Sufyānid line of Umayyad caliphs came to an end. In the same year, major Shiʿa rebellions broke out in Iraq, which continued for the next fifty years until the end of the Umayyad dynasty. The killing of Ḥusayn had shocked the Muslim community. The Kufans witnessed the shackled women and children from the Prophet's family paraded in their streets, and his grandson's head raised on a spear. They heard Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm's speeches chastising them, rousing them to grief for their role in Ḥusayn's death. In 64/683 four thousand came together as the Penitents (Tawwābūn) to pledge "revenge for the blood of Ḥusayn." En masse, they mourned at Ḥusayn's tomb in Karbala, then advanced toward Damascus. The Umayyads engaged them with a large force at ʿAyn Warda near the Syrian border and killed all but a few. Soon thereafter, another Kufan leader named Mukhtār al-Thaqafī (who claimed to represent Ḥusayn's half-brother Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥanafiyya) constructed a domed mausoleum over Ḥusayn's grave and built a mosque at the site. Mukhtār was later besieged and killed, but not before he had executed thousands of men implicated in the Karbala killing, including Ibn Ziyād, Shimr, and other leaders.

The early mobilizations and collective lamentations in Ḥusayn's name formed a catalyst for the crystallization of formal Shiʿism, which had developed nebulously up to that time, and the orations of Ḥusayn's sisters played an important role in the development

12 In Kufa, Ibn Ziyād ordered Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn executed, and Zaynab protected his life, saying she would have to be killed first (ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār*, 4:151).

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of Shiʿa identity. Umm Kulthūm's speech in Kufa and Zaynab's speech in Damascus are said to have raised awareness of what many perceived to be the iniquity of the Umayyad regime, setting it against Ḥusayn's message of justice and sacrifice. A detailed assessment of the rights and wrongs of the Karbala episode is outside the scope of this article, but it is important to note that through the ages, it is among the few narratives on which the vast majority of Muslims have agreed. Both Sunni and Shiʿa, by and large, condemn Yazīd's words and actions, and applaud those of Ḥusayn and his sisters.

Implications for Notions of Gender, Martyrdom, and Authority

The silenced female voice is a well-known motif of gender and postcolonial studies. In her groundbreaking essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Gayatri Spivak lays out with precision how women's voices in colonial India were muzzled by patriarchal structures (and by Western feminisms).[13] This phenomenon is also germane to early Islamic times, when women were rarely heard in the public arena. Early Islamic society produced many strong women, including some close to the Prophet Muḥammad, and there is no indication that women did not have a voice in the private sphere. But formal public address to a large number of unrelated males was not sanctioned by the society's views on modesty, and most orations by females in our sources are subversive of expected gender roles. It would appear that from time to time unusual situations arose that forced otherwise veiled females to speak out in public. Thus, for example, when the Prophet Muḥammad died, his daughter Fāṭima is said to have orated "from behind a curtain" in the caliph Abū Bakr's court in Medina, fighting for her right to inherit the lands of Fadak from her father, and asserting her husband ʿAlī's right to succeed him.[14] The speeches attributed to Fāṭima's daughters, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm, were also delivered at a time of distress and emergency that forced them to speak formally in a public, male arena. Although trauma often leads to a repression of speech—Judith Herman, for example, has shown how domestic violence shuts down the victim,[15] and Elaine Scarry has shown how pain stifles language and creativity[16]—our case study exhibits the polar opposite effect. Here, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm's voices are not subdued in the public sphere, but rather their ordeal is what prompts them to deliver public speeches.

Martyrdom is an extreme case of trauma, and it emancipates its victims from society's usual constraints. Ruḥayma bint ʿAẓama (fl. sixth century AD), a pre-Islamic Christian

13 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. R. C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 22 and passim.

14 Ṭayfūr, *Balāghāt al-nisāʾ*, 54–65; Aḥmad Zakī Ṣafwat, comp., *Jamharat khuṭab al-ʿarab fī l-ʿuṣūr al-ʿarabiyya al-zāhira*, 3 vols. (Cairo: al-Maktaba al-ʿIlmiyya, 1933–34), 1:306. For the text and translation of Fāṭima's oration, see Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration*, 385–88. An oration by the Prophet's widow ʿĀʾisha urging her supporters to fight against ʿAlī in the Battle of the Camel is anomalous within the small corpus of women's speeches as it is not delivered in a situation of personal threat or disenfranchisement (Ṭayfūr, *Balāghāt al-nisāʾ*, 41–44; Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration*, 388–90).

15 Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), passim.

16 Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), passim.

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martyr from Najrān, is reported to have spoken unveiled to an open audience in the marketplace. Her contemporary, Bishop Simeon of Bēth Arshām, writes about her: "the woman whose face no one had ever seen outside the door of her house … stood before the whole city with her head uncovered …"[17] While Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm are not martyrs themselves—and martyrdom of any Muslim woman is not noted by historical sources—their speeches are rooted in the context of their brother's martyrdom and their own suffering during that event.

Moreover, although Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm did not hold official leadership positions at a time when orations were typically declaimed by people of authority, they were women of rank and clout in the community. Deriving from lineage and learning, their orations manifested that authority. Due to their authoritative status and the martyrdom context, their traumatic circumstances do not silence them. These allow and even prompt them to declaim freely and publicly, to challenge and censure the highest political and military power of their time.

The Orations' Provenance and Orality

The earliest extant versions of Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm's orations are recorded by the Baghdadi writer Ibn Abī Ṭāhir Ṭayfūr (d. 280/893) in his anthology of eloquent verbal productions by women, *Balāghāt al-nisā'*, among the first literary collections in the Arabic tradition.[18] The Kufa oration is also recorded by his younger contemporary Ibn Aʿtham al-Kūfī.[19] The orations' immediate contexts (without the texts) are described by the early historians Ṭabarī, Balādhurī, Qāḍī l-Nuʿmān, and Ṣadūq.[20] The Kufa oration is also recorded by Thaʿālibī (429/1038) and Mufīd,[21] and both texts are recorded by several later Shiʿa scholars, including the theologian Ṭabrisī (fl. first half of the sixth/twelfth century), and the historian Ibn Ṭāwūs. From Ibn Aʿtham onward, our sources attribute both

17 Text and report of oration in Simeon of Bēth Arshām, *Letter*, ed. and trans. I. Shahīd as *The Martyrs of Najrân: New Documents* (Bruxelles: Soc. des Bollandistes, 1971), 57–58, trans. Shahīd from Syriac; the original Arabic is lost. See also comments on the text by Irfan Shahīd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1995), 332–33.

18 Ṭayfūr, *Balāghāt al-nisā'*, 70–77. This text is also one of a handful of anthologies that record women's aesthetic verbal productions. Three more anthologies of female poets are extant, one treating pre-Islamic and early Islamic times by Marzubānī (d. 384/994), and two the Abbasid period by Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣbahānī and Suyūṭī (d. 911/1505). Suyūṭī also mentions a lost six-volume anthology of early female poets by Ibn al-Ṭarrāḥ (d. 720/1320), which indicates that at least in early times, women's poetic production was more dynamic than is generally believed. See details in Tahera Qutbuddin, "Women: Poets," in *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia*, ed. J. Meri (New York: Routledge, 2005), 2:865–67.

19 Ibn Aʿtham, *Futūḥ*, 5:121–23.

20 Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5:453–55, 459, 465; *History*, 19:163, 168, 175–76; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 2:507, 509; Nuʿmān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 3:170.

21 ʿAbd al-Malik ibn Muḥammad al-Thaʿālibī, *al-Iqtibās min al-Qur'ān*, ed. I. M. al-Ṣaffār, 2 vols. (Manṣūra, Iraq: Dār al-Wafā', 1992), 1:93–95; Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Mufīd, *Amālī al-Shaykh al-Mufīd* (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥaydariyya, 1962), 198–99.

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texts to Zaynab, and that attribution is a strong possibility.[22] With that caveat, I follow in this article the earliest version of Ṭayfūr: the Kufa oration is discussed with reference to Umm Kulthūm, and the Damascus oration with reference to Zaynab.

Most orations in the early Islamic period were transmitted orally over a few generations, supplemented in some cases with transcription, before being recorded systematically in writing in the late second/eighth and early third/ninth century AD. Oral materials are particularly susceptible to alteration, and some orations were modified or even fabricated out of whole cloth. Even so, the texts cited by historical and literary sources are likely to contain a number of genuine remnants.[23] Studies of the hybrid oral/written mode of transmission in early Islam by scholars such as Gregor Schoeler, of inscriptions and writing in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic period by scholars such as Robert Hoyland, of memory in oral societies by scholars such as Mary Carruthers, and of oral mnemonics by scholars such as Richard Foley, Ruth Finnegan, and Walter Ong, substantiate this position.[24] Ong demonstrates that all thought and verbal expression in an oral culture is essentially mnemonic and he explains the details of this memorization-grounded style thus:[25]

> In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready, oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings … in proverbs which are heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems.

22 Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Ṭabrisī, *al-Iḥtijāj*, comm. M. B. al-Mūsawī, 2 parts in 1 vol. (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī and Muʾassasat Ahl al-Bayt, 1989), 2:303–5, 307–10; Ibn Ṭāwūs, *al-Malhūf ʿalā qatlā al-ṭufūf*, ed. F. T. al-Ḥassūn (Qum: Dār al-Uswa, 1417/1996), 192–93, 215–18. Ibn Ṭāwūs attributes another, shorter piece spoken in Kufa to Umm Kulthūm (Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Malhūf*, 198–99). Furthermore, (1) some sources refer to Umm Kulthūm as "the younger Zaynab," Zaynab al-Ṣughrā, indicating that "Umm Kulthūm" was her filionymic (and they refer to Zaynab herself as "the elder Zaynab," Zaynab al-Kubrā)—in this version, both sisters were named Zaynab; (2) some sources state that Umm Kulthūm died before Karbala, and the reports about her in the Karbala narrative are misnamed; and (3) some sources mention two more daughters of ʿAlī named Umm Kulthūm—all this complicates the precise identification of our speakers.

23 This argument is fleshed out in some detail, with references from the primary sources and studies on orality and memory, in Qutbuddin, "The Preservations of Orations: Mnemonics-Based Oral Transmission, Supplementary Writing and the Question of Authenticity," in *Arabic Oration*, 21-63.

24 Major works in these fields include: Robert Hoyland, "The Content and Context of Early Arabic Inscriptions," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 21 (1997): 77–102; Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (London and New York: Routledge, 1982); Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992); John Miles Foley, *Immanent Art: From Structure to Meaning in Traditional Oral Epic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Gregor Schoeler, *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read*, trans. S. M. Toorawa (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

25 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 34–35.

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Ong's characterization has implications for questions of both the authenticity and the aesthetics of our orations. As will be seen in the following pages, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm's speeches contained mnemonic devices that aided retention, such as parallelism, pithy sentences, poetic repetition, vivid imagery, and citation of revered material like the Qur'an and poetry.

Umm Kulthūm's (or Zaynab's) Kufa Oration

Ṭayfūr narrates that when the women and children of the Prophet's family were taken in captivity to Kufa, people thronged the streets and wailed and wept. Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn raised his head and said in a weak voice, "O people of Kufa, you weep for us now! Who was it, pray, who killed us, if not you?!" Then Umm Kulthūm—seated on a camel, according to some reports—gestured to the people to be quiet, and delivered a passionate oration grieving and glorifying Ḥusayn, and castigating and condemning the audience. Below is the text of the oration:

Text and Translation

I begin with praise of God and benedictions on my grandfather.	أبدأ بحمد الله والصلاة والسلام على أَبِيَه.
O people of Kufa! O people of deception and betrayal!	أمّا بعد يا أهل الكوفة يا أهل الختر والخذل.
May your tears never stop! No, indeed! May your wails never abate!	لا فلا رقأت العبرة ولا هدأت الرنّة.
Truly, you are like "the woman who breaks the yarn which she herself has spun and made strong. You take your oaths as a means to deceive."[26]	إنّما مثلكم كمثل ﴿الَّتِي نَقَضَتْ غَزْلَهَا مِن بَعْدِ قُوَّةٍ أَنكَاثاً تَتَّخِذُونَ أَيْمَانَكُمْ دَخَلاً بَيْنَكُمْ﴾.
Listen and heed! Do you possess anything except pride and insolence, the sycophancy of the slave, and the finger-pointing of the enemy?	ألا وهل فيكم إلّا الصلف والشنف وملق الإماء وغمز الأعداء.
Are you anything other than green herbage growing on a dung heap, silver ornaments on a dead woman's buried corpse?	وهل أنتم إلّا كمرعى على دمنة وكفضّة على ملحودة.
Listen and heed! Vile indeed are the evil deeds you have committed. God is angered against you, and you will dwell forever in his punishment.[27]	ألا ساء ما قدّمت أنفسكم أن سخط الله عليكم وفي العذاب أنتم خالدون.

26 Qur'an, Naḥl 16:92.

27 Modifed quote from Qur'an, Mā'ida 5:80.

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Do you weep?! Yes, by God, weep! Indeed, you deserve to weep! Weep long and laugh little![28]

أتبكون أي والله فٱبكوا. وإنّكم والله أحرياء بالبكاء. فٱبكوا كثيرًا وٱضحكوا قليلًا.

Your prize is shame and infamy. You can never wash it away.

فلقد فزتم بعارها وشَنَارها. ولن ترحضوها بغسل بعدها أبدًا.

How indeed would you erase the killing of the scion of the seal of prophecy, descendent of the mine of messengership, chief of the youth of paradise, beacon for your path, your spokesman and defender, the only one who could have removed your hardships!

وأنّى ترحضون قتل سليل خاتم النبوّة ومعدن الرسالة وسيّد شبّان أهل الجنّة ومنار محجّتكم ومدره حجّتكم ومفرخ نازلتكم.

Woe to you and damnation! You have failed in what you strove for. Your transaction has ended in loss.

فتعسًا ونكسًا. لقد خاب السعي وخسرت الصفقة.

You have returned "with God's anger." "Ignominy and humiliation has overshadowed" you. "You have brought forth something monstrous whereat the heavens might be rent into fragments, the earth be split asunder, and the mountains fall down in ruins!"[29]

وبؤتم ﴿بِغَضَبٍ مِّنَ ٱللَّهِ﴾ وضربت عليكم ﴿ٱلذِّلَّةُ وَٱلْمَسْكَنَةُ﴾. ﴿لَّقَدْ جِئْتُمْ شَيْـًٔا إِدًّا ۝ تَكَادُ ٱلسَّمَٰوَٰتُ يَتَفَطَّرْنَ مِنْهُ وَتَنشَقُّ ٱلْأَرْضُ وَتَخِرُّ ٱلْجِبَالُ هَدًّا ۝﴾.

Do you realize that you have stabbed Muḥammad's heart,[30] violated his sanctity, and spilled his blood?

أتدرون أيّ كبد لرسول الله فريتم وأيّ كريمة له أبرزتم وأيّ دم له سفكتم.

You have performed a wicked, despicable deed whose terror fills the earth and sky. Are you amazed, then, that the sky has rained blood?

لقد جئتم بها شوهاء خرقاء. شرّها طلّاع الأرض والسماء. أفعجبتم أن قطرت السماء دمًا.

"The punishment in the hereafter will be far more humiliating, and they will have no one to help them." Do not be deceived by this respite and lull. God has no need of haste. He does not fear that the opportunity for vengeance will slip away. No indeed! "Your lord is watching" us and you.[31]

﴿وَلَعَذَابُ ٱلْآخِرَةِ أَخْزَىٰ وَهُمْ لَا يُنصَرُونَ ۝﴾. فلا يستخفنّكم المهل. فإنّه لا تحفزه المبادرة ولا يخاف عليه فوت الثأر. كلّا ﴿إِنَّ رَبَّكَ﴾ لنا ولهم ﴿لَبِٱلْمِرْصَادِ ۝﴾.

28 Modifed quote from Qur'an, Tawba 9:82.

29 Qur'an, Baqara 2:61 (the first two phrases are from this verse, in reverse order); Qur'an, Maryam 19:89–90.

30 Lit. *liver*, in early Islamic culture, considered the seat of emotions.

31 Qur'an, Fuṣṣilat 41:16, Fajr 89:14.

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Annotation

Umm Kulthūm's opening lines (sections 1–4)—naming the Prophet as her grandfather in the formulaic praise of God, vocative address to the audience as disloyal, maledictions for them to suffer, and Qurʾanic quotation referencing their treachery—frame the rest of her oration. The medieval Arabic critics use the term *ingenuous exordium* (*barāʿat al-istihlāl*)[32] for such a foreshadowing, usually with reference to epistles and treatises, and the idea is also applicable to oral address. The movement from general to specific is also seen in Arabic poetry, which Qazwīnī called "combination-cum-division" (*al-jamʿ maʿa l-taqsīm*).[33] In a microcosm of the speech, Umm Kulthūm's introductory statements presage the themes she will cover in the rest of her speech.

The structure of early Arabic oration was highly conventional, and the slightest tweaking produced a personalized address to which the audience would presumably be extremely sensitive. As such, the standard structure lent itself to the censure that we see built into Umm Kulthūm's speech. She opens with a formulaic line contextualized to her message (section 1): "I begin with praise of God and benedictions on my grandfather." Muslim orations traditionally commence with such a formula, the *taḥmīd*, and in addition to its liturgical function, it establishes explicit and implicit relations between the speaker, the audience, God, and other personages crucial to the context.[34] Umm Kulthūm, at the very outset of her speech, uses the formula itself to remind the audience that her family was the Prophet's family; that Muḥammad, the man the Kufans believed to be God's messenger, was her grandfather.

She then turns to address her audience in a formal vocative, again contextualized to the situation at hand (section 2). Instead of the generic address, "O people," "Servants of God," or "Muslims," she specifies the town-based identity of her audience, saying, "People of Kufa!" As mentioned earlier, the Kufans had invited Ḥusayn to come and accept their pledge of allegiance, then turned around and participated in his killing. It is in this context too that Umm Kulthūm characterizes her listeners in the next line of the vocative, saying, "People of deception and betrayal!" We see similar characterizations from time to time in other speeches from this period. For example, in the wake of the attack on Ḥīra by Muʿāwiya's commander Ḍaḥḥāk ibn Qays al-Fihrī, Umm Kulthūm's father ʿAlī

32 al-Khaṭīb al-Qazwīnī, *al-Talkhīṣ fī ʿulūm al-balāgha,* ed. ʿA. al-Barqūqī (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 1904), 431; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Mathal al-sāʾir*, ed. M. M. ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd, 2 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-ʿAṣriyya, 1999), 1:87, 2:223–44, explains the concept at length with examples, but without using the term; S. A. Bonebakker, "Ibtidāʾ," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., ed. P. Bearman, T. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs.

33 Qazwīnī, *Talkhīṣ,* 365; Heinrichs, "Rhetorical Figures," *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. J. Meisami and P. Starkey, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1998), 2:658.

34 See Aziz Qutbuddin's theoretical framework for examining these relationships in "A Literary Analysis of *Taḥmīd*: A Relational Approach for Studying the Arabic-Islamic Laudatory Preamble," in B. De Nicola, Y. Mendel, and H. Qutbuddin, ed., *Reflections on Knowledge and Language in Middle Eastern Societies* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 63–89, where he calls them *nisba* and *fikra* relations.

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had spoken to his slow-to-respond Kufan subjects also with an address of censure: "O people, whose bodies are united and whose aspirations are divided!"[35]

Umm Kulthūm highlights her address phrase with an attached malediction (section 3): "May your tears never stop! No, indeed! May your wails never abate!" The doubled lines, like the majority of clauses and phrases in the oration (and also in Zaynab's oration), are structurally parallel, parallelism being the hallmark of early Arabic oration's mnemonic rhythm. Moreover, with her verbal reference to their weeping, the audience is shown to be shocked and devastated. But here are the family members of the Prophet, prisoners in their midst, with—even now—not a single hand stretched forward to help them, not a single voice speaking out for their cause. In this sense, while the Umayyads were known enemies of the Prophet's family, these Iraqis who professed veneration for the Banū Hāshim, who avowed support of ʿAlī and his descendants, had also played the Umayyad game. They were the ones who facilitated the massacre. This is the gist of Umm Kulthūm's condemnation of the Kufans. Her speech is primed to be pungently belligerent, for, as Ong explains, oral milieu verbal production is inherently agonistic in tone:

> Many, if not all, oral or residually oral cultures strike literates as extraordinarily agonistic in their verbal performance and indeed in their lifestyle. Writing fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another. It separates the knower from the known. By keeping knowledge embedded in the human lifeworld, orality situates knowledge within a context of struggle … The common and persistent physical hardships of life in many early societies of course explain in part the high evidence of violence in early verbal art forms.[36]

The special circumstances of Umm Kulthūm's speech push on that innate tendency of oral literature to use a heightened rhetorical word palette.

Now, with the Qurʾan quotation (section 4)—and it is interesting to note that Thaʿālibī's report of Umm Kulthūm's oration text comes in his book on Qurʾan citation—she harnesses the divine revelation to her argument, explicitly projecting the Kufans as the embodiment of the verse. They have "broken the yarn which they themselves had spun and made strong." They swear "deceiving oaths," which they break without compunction. She goes on to even more explicit chastisement (section 5): The Kufans are "proud and insolent," "sycophantic slaves" to the Umayyad rulers, and "finger-pointing enemies" of the family of the Prophet. Moreover, this new section opens with the exclamation *alā*, loosely translated as "Listen and heed!" An ejaculation setting up the agonistic theme it prefaces, the use of this word is common in early oration, whose aesthetic package includes a large number of audience-engagement features: emphatic structures, direct address, real and rhetorical questions, and prescriptive phrases.

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35 (أيّها الناس المجتمعة أبدانهم المختلفة أهواؤهم) Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 2:380–81; ʿAmr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Bayān wa-l-tabyīn*, ed. ʿA. M. Hārūn, 4 parts in 2 vols. (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1985), 2:56; al-Sharīf Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn al-Raḍī, *Nahj al-balāgha*, ed. Ḥ. al-Aʿlamī, comm. M. ʿAbduh (Beirut: Muʾassasat al-Aʿlamī, 1993), 95-97.

36 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 43–44.

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Umm Kulthūm goes on to flay her audience with two graphic images culled from their shared religious and literary heritage (section 6). Graphic imagery is an essential feature of early Arabic oratory,[37] and the profusion of pictures rooted in the human lifeworld is a defining characteristic of orality more broadly.[38] The first distinctive phrase comparing the Kufans to "green herbage growing on a dung heap" features in a prophetic hadith, which is interpreted by some scholars to mean one should not marry a beautiful woman whose lineage is suspect.[39] The phrase could be viewed more generally as a maxim warning against a fine exterior that hides a foul interior. The second graphic image, comparing the Kufans to "silver ornaments on a dead woman's buried corpse," portrays the utter meaninglessness of the Kufans' "silver" empathy when their actions—at the time they could have counted for something, when there was still something they could have done to prevent the tragedy, when there was still "life in the body"—have fallen far short.[40]

Umm Kulthūm opens the next segment again with the same exclamation (section 7) "Listen and heed!" with a pronouncement on the wickedness of their actions and the dire repercussions to follow: "Vile indeed are the evil deeds you have committed. God is angered against you, and you will dwell forever in his punishment." Then she addresses the audience's continued weeping with bitterness (section 8): "Do you weep?! Yes, by God, weep!" Insisting on their culpability with repetition—repetition also being a key feature of orality—she adds the tag line, "Indeed, you deserve to weep!" She follows with another chastisement, "Weep long and laugh little!" which, again telling the audience to weep, adds the element of lengthy duration. Moreover, it caps off the point, being a modified quote from the Qur'anic verse: "Let them laugh little and weep long, in recompense for what they have done."[41]

The verse citation is metonymical, evoking the uncited verse before it: "Those who stayed behind rejoiced in their staying back from (supporting) God's messenger, for they disliked striving with their possessions and their lives in God's cause. They said (to their fellows), Do not go forth to war in this heat! Say: The fires of hell blaze hotter! If only they would understand!"[42]

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37 For analysis of imagery in early oration, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "The Sermons of ʿAli ibn Abi Talib: At the Confluence of the Core Islamic Teachings of the Qur'an and the Oral, Nature-Based Cultural Ethos of Seventh Century Arabia," *Anuario de Estudios Medievales* 42, no. 1 (2012), monograph volume titled *La predicación medieval: sermones cristianos, judios e islámicos en el Mediterráneo*, ed. L. G. Jones, 201–28; and Qutbuddin, "Style of the Oration: The Aesthetics of Orality and Persuasion," in *Arabic Oration*, 91–164.

38 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 42–43.

39 al-Qāḍī Muḥammad ibn Salāma al-Quḍāʿī, *Kitāb al-Shihāb*, ed. and trans. T. Qutbuddin as *Light in the Heavens: Sayings of the Prophet Muḥammad* (New York: New York University Press, Library of Arabic Literature, 2016), see 114–15 (section 6.90), 185n9.

40 I have not found this phrase listed in the medieval proverb anthologies or within the orations of other orators of the period; it appears to be Umm Kulthūm's own coinage.

41 (فَلْيَضْحَكُوا قَلِيلًا وَلْيَبْكُوا كَثِيرًا جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ). Qur'an, Tawba 9:82.

42 (فَرِحَ ٱلْمُخَلَّفُونَ بِمَقْعَدِهِمْ خِلَافَ رَسُولِ ٱللَّهِ وَكَرِهُوٓاْ أَن يُجَٰهِدُواْ بِأَمْوَٰلِهِمْ وَأَنفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ وَقَالُواْ لَا تَنفِرُواْ فِي ٱلْحَرِّ قُلْ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ أَشَدُّ حَرًّا لَّوْ كَانُوا يَفْقَهُونَ). Qur'an, Tawba 9:81.

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Like mnemonic traits of rhythm, imagery, and citation, metonymy is another fundamental element of oral-society texts:[43]

> [Metonymy is] a mode of signification wherein the part stands for the whole … [and] the text or version is enriched by an unspoken context that dwarfs the actual artifact, in which the experience is filled out—and made traditional—by what the conventionality attracts to itself from that context… . Submerged beneath the surface of the single tale or element lies a wealth of associations accessible only under the agreement of metonymic representation and interpretation.

The audience could be presumed to know the evoked verse and relates it to their own situation. According to the "occasion of revelation" (*sabab al-nuzūl*) ascribed to it by medieval exegetes, it was originally revealed in censure of those among Muḥammad's following who stayed back from answering his call for help at one of his last major battles, Tabūk.[44] In Umm Kulthūm's evocation, it conveys to the Kufans who held back from defending Ḥusayn—because they were fearful of losing their lives and possessions, and because they could not take "the heat"—that they should have feared more the fires of hell. From now on, they possess only endless weeping.

But the weeping will not be of any avail. Umm Kulthūm's next pronouncement explains its futility, saying, "Your prize is shame and infamy. You can never wash it away" (section 9). These lines use first a vivid Arabian image of horseracing and/or arrow divination to speak ironically of a "prize," and then another of personal hygiene, commonly employed in classical Arabic oration to reference shame. The images portray the Kufans' titanic failure. The great trial has come and gone. Nothing they do can change their action. The image is made even more poignant because with the word "wash" it evokes Ḥusayn's blood on the Kufans' hands, which all their tears cannot wash away. Next, Umm Kulthūm calls out what they have done in blunt terms: they have killed Ḥusayn (section 10). "How indeed would you erase the killing of the scion of the seal of prophecy, descendent of the mine of messengership … ?" Yet, though the condemnation is brusque, the tool employed—of a rhetorical question (*istifhām taqrīrī*)—is sharp. With multiple, parallel segments coming wave after wave, it has the audience members themselves answer in their heads with a resounding affirmation. Moreover, a vital reference is to Muḥammad's hadith, "Ḥasan and Ḥusayn are chiefs of the youth of paradise," with which Umm Kulṯum asserts Ḥusayn's high spiritual station.[45] The terms she uses to praise Ḥusayn intertwine religion and politics, acclaim of Ḥusayn's illustrious spiritual

43 Foley, *Immanent Art*, 7–8, 11.

44 Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, exegesis of Surah Tawba 9:81, http://www.altafsir.com.

45 Nuʿmān, *Sharḥ al-akhbār*, 3:76; Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 2:368. Ḥusayn himself had cited this hadith in the speech addressed to the Umayyad army on 'Āshūrā' morning, the day he was slain. Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5:423–26, *History*, 19:122–24 (translation); Balādhurī, *Ansāb al-ashrāf*, 2:488; Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *al-'Iqd al-farīd*, 4:356; Sibṭ Ibn al-Jawzī, *Tadhkirah*, 251–53; Ṣafwat, *Jamharat khuṭab al-'arab*, 2:52–53. For the text, translation and analysis of Ḥusayn's oration, see Qutbuddin, *Arabic Oration*, 216–27.

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rank combining with tribute to his righteous temporal leadership, as she tells the Kufans he was a "beacon for your path, your spokesman and defender, the only one who could have removed your hardships!" The heinous deed is all the more wicked because of the identity of the man they have killed.

In the next lines, Umm Kulthūm continues with more anger against the Kufans, with maledictions and condemnation further intensifying the agonistic tone of the speech (section 11): "Woe to you and damnation! You have failed in what you strove for. Your transaction has ended in loss." Then, she piles on multiple Qur'an quotations to highlight the enormity of the retribution coming to them (section 12), announcing that: "You have returned 'with God's anger,' and 'ignominy and humiliation has overshadowed' you"—both are phrases from a single long Qur'anic verse. The contents of the quotation emphasize that Ḥusayn's killing was not that of an ordinary mortal. Rather, the Kufans had "brought forth something monstrous," which had cosmic significance so immense that "the heavens are rent into fragments, the earth split asunder, and the mountains fall down in ruins." In the Qur'an, these quotations come in the narratives of earlier communities who challenged their prophets and God. Umm Kulthūm metonymically evokes the whole context: The Kufans have incurred God's anger like the Israelites, who, in the verse quoted, expressed gross ingratitude for God's bounties in the wilderness. They have "brought forth something monstrous," like those perpetrators in the next verse quoted, who claimed that God had begotten a son. No accusation is spelled out here; the quotations do that work, implying that just like the Israelites and the Christians who strayed from the mandate of their monotheistic faith, the Kufans have gone over to the dark side. They have gone beyond the pale of Islam in killing the grandson of Islam's Prophet. The next line reminds the Muslim audience of the pain his grandson's killing has caused his departed grandfather (section 13): "Do you realize that you have stabbed Muḥammad's heart, violated his sanctity, and spilled his blood?" In the next lines again, cosmic notes prevail. After declaring that they had "performed a wicked, despicable deed," Umm Kulthūm continues, "whose terror fills the earth and sky," and she asks her audience, using an unsettling and gory image, "are you then amazed that the sky has rained blood?"

As the oration nears the end, the Qur'an quotes come ever thicker and faster. Umm Kulthūm's individual words give way entirely to the words of the Holy Book and merge with them. With citation after citation and metonymy after metonymy, those past worlds become one with her current reality. With her penultimate Qur'an quote (section 15), she evokes the end mentioned for all who challenged God's prophets in the past, whose terrible downfall the Qur'an outlines in great detail. She warns the malefactors who have harmed Muḥammad's family God's harsh retribution: "The punishment in the hereafter will be far more humiliating, and they [meaning "you"—the dissonance in pronoun is due to the verbatim quote] will have no one to help them."

Umm Kulthūm's reliance on God to avenge her brother, who is shown here to be God's own beloved, subverts the traditional pre-Islamic idea of blood-vengeance. Vengeance (*thaʿr*) is a concept that permeates the early Arabians' battle stories (*ayyām al-ʿarab*), and infuses the lament poems of the preeminent female poet Khansā' (d. after 24/644; more on her later) who, in elegies for her brother, goads her tribesmen to seek vengeance for his killing. Using

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the same Arabic term *thaʿr* but attributing it to God's omnipotent power, Umm Kulthūm ends her speech with a stern warning (section 14): "Do not be deceived by this respite and lull. God has no need of haste. He does not fear that the opportunity for vengeance will slip away. No indeed!" Umm Kulthūm's last line that seals her oration, is a Qur'anic verse that sets up God as the arbiter between the parties, "Your lord is watching us and you."

The narrator of the report of Umm Kulthūm's oration in Ṭayfūr's account, and also in Ibn Aʿtham's and Mufīd's, Ḥudhām (or Ḥudhaym or Khuzayma) al-Asadī, tells his interlocutor: "I have never seen a more eloquent lady. It was as though she spoke with the tongue of the commander of the faithful." He means her father, ʿAlī, widely acknowledged as a master orator of Islam. As underscored by the narrator, Umm Kulthūm presented to her audience a living flesh-and-blood expression of her revered departed forebears. After completing the text of the oration, Ḥudhām describes the audience's reaction: "Umm Kulthūm then turned away from them. The people were left stunned and speechless, standing with their hands on their mouths." He adds that "an elderly shaykh from the Juʿf clan, beard soaked with tears, intoned the following verse of poetry:

> Their elders are the best elders
> Their descendants will never perish, never stand down.[46]

The "elders" invoked in the verse presumably refer to Muḥammad and ʿAlī, perhaps even the Prophet's uncle Ḥamza, who was martyred in Uḥud, and, more generally, other male members of his illustrious family. But the identity of the "descendants" praised here as individuals who will "never stand down" is worth parsing in the context of subverted gender roles. In a patriarchal society, it would be likely for Ḥudhām to be referring to Ḥasan and Ḥusayn, and he probably is. But he includes in his praise Umm Kulthūm, not a man, but a woman who has taken on the public role of a man, the role of an orator, a leader, a defender of the faith.

Zaynab's Damascus Oration

From Kufa, sources report that Ibn Ziyād sent the women to the capital Damascus. Ṭayfūr relates that the Umayyad caliph Yazīd had them stand before him as he sat on his throne surrounded by his courtiers and soldiers, and had Ḥusayn's decapitated head placed in a basin. Grasping a cane, he struck Ḥusayn's mouth and said mockingly, "You have such beautiful teeth!" Then he recited six verses:

> ... I wish my venerable forefathers at the Battle of Badr had witnessed
> The panic of the Khazraj in the face of our spears ...
> They would have declaimed: Praise God and shine forth in joy!
> And said: Yazīd, may your hands never wither!
> I've avenged my elders at Badr
> The ledger is balanced
> I would not be the son of my great forebears
> If I had not killed Aḥmad's sons.

46 (كهولهم خير الكهول ونسلهم/ إذا عدّ نسل لا يبور ولا يخزى)

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The first three verses that Yazīd cites (including two that I have not translated here), are from a lampoon against the Prophet Muḥammad composed by the pagan poet ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zibaʿrā (d. ca. 23/644) at the Battle of Uḥud (3/625), in which the Muslims suffered heavy losses;[47] the Khazraj whom he ridicules were a Medinan tribe among the "Allies" who supported Muḥammad. The next three verses, starting with "They would have declaimed," were presumably composed by Yazīd on the spot as he looked at Ḥusayn's decapitated head; the "elders" he refers to are the Meccan pagans whom Muḥammad killed at Badr; the name Aḥmad is a variation of Muḥammad.

As Yazīd recites these verses, Zaynab, a woman, a captive, steps forward to challenge his words and actions. In an excoriating speech addressed overtly to the ruler and simultaneously to all people present in his court, she laments Ḥusayn, castigates Yazīd, and uses sacred texts to profess the authority of the Prophet's family.

Text and Translation

صدق الله ورسوله يا يزيد ﴿ثُمَّ كَانَ عَاقِبَةَ ٱلَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا ٱلسُّوٓأَىٰٓ أَن كَذَّبُوا بِـَٔايَـٰتِ ٱللَّهِ وَكَانُوا بِهَا يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ۝﴾.

God and his messenger spoke the truth, Yazīd: "Evildoers obtain an evil end, for they reject God's signs and ridicule them."[48]

أظننت يا يزيد أنّه حين أخذ علينا بأطراف الأرض وأكناف السماء فأصبحنا نساق كما يساق الأسارى أنّ بنا هوانًا على الله وبك عليه كرامة وأنّ هذا لعظيم خطرك.

Do you think that because we have been driven as captive slaves and forced to traverse the far reaches of the earth with no shelter but the sky, we are insignificant in God's eyes and you have honor? That all this happened because of your immense stature?

فشمخت بأنفك ونظرت في عطفيك جذلانًا فرحًا حين رأيت الدنيا مستوسقة لك والأمور متّسقة عليك.

You raise your nose and look about you gay and happy, seeing the whole world flocking to you and under your control.

وقد أمهلت ونفّست وهو يقول ﴿ولا يَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوٓا أَنَّمَا نُمْلِى لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمْلِى لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوٓا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ ۝﴾.

Truly, this is nothing but a respite and a lull, these are the few moments you can breathe before the punishment descends. God says, "Let not disbelievers think that our respite is a good thing. Indeed, we give them respite so that they may increase in trespass, and a shameful punishment awaits them."[49]

47 ʿAbd al-Malik Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, ed. A. Ḥ. al-Saqqā, 4 parts in 2 vols. (Cairo: Dār al-Turāth al-ʿArabī, n.d.), 2:102. Of the first three verses, I have transcribed only the second, which Zaynab references in her oration.

48 Qur'an, Rūm 30:10.

49 Qur'an, Āl ʿImrān 3:178.

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Is it just, O freedmen's son, for you to veil your women and concubines, while you drive forward God's messenger's daughters thus, veils torn, grieving, voices hoarse with weeping? Jolted by speeding camels, herded from town to town by rancorous enemies, unguarded and undefended? Those near and far speaking to them directly, without shame?

For they have no male protector to shield them! How to stop those who stare at us with coveting and rancor, hatred and malice!

Do you dare to say, "I wish my venerable forefathers at the Battle of Badr had witnessed Ḥusayn's killing!" Do you not understand that it is a sin, a major transgression?

Do you dare to strike Abū ʿAbdallāh's teeth with your cane!

But all this can happen, for you have picked the wound and extirpated the root by spilling the blood of the messenger's children, stars of the earth from ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib's line.

But wait. Soon you too shall come before God, as they have done, and you will wish that you had been born blind and dumb, that you had never intoned, "Praise God and shine forth in joy!"

God, grant us our rights, and give us vengeance from those who oppressed us.

By God, you have pared naught but your own skin, incised naught but your own flesh.

You shall come before God's messenger, despite yourself. His children, his family, will be with him in the garden. That day, God will bring them together, gathered after long separation.

That is almighty God's pledge, "Do not think that those killed in the path of God are dead. They are alive and sustained in their lord's presence."[50]

أمن العدل يابن الطلقاء
تخديرك نساءك وإماءك
وسوقك بنات رسول الله
قد هتكت ستورهنّ
وأصحلت صوتهنّ
مكتئبات تخدي بهنّ
الأباعر ويحدو بهنّ
الأعادي من بلد الى بلد
لا يراقبن ولا يؤوبن
يتشوّفهنّ القريب والبعيد.

ليس معهنّ وليّ من
رجالهنّ وكيف يستبطأ
في بغضتنا من نظر إلينا
بالشنق والشنآن والإحن
والأضغان.

أتقول <لَيْتَ أَشْيَاخِي بِبَدْرٍ
شَهِدُوْا> غير متأثّم ولا
مستعظم.

وأنت تنكث ثنايا أبي عبد
الله بمخصرتك.

ولم لا تكون كذلك وقد
نكأت القرحة وٱستأصلت
الشأفة بإهراقك دماء ذرّيّة
رسول الله ونجوم الأرض
من آل عبد المطّلب.

ولتردنّ على الله وشيكًا
موردهم ولتودّنّ أنّك
عميت وبكمت وأنّك لم
تقل <فَأَسْتَهِلُّوا وَأَهِلُّوا
فَرَحًا>.

اللّهمّ خذ بحقّنا وٱنتقم لنا
ممّن ظلمنا.

والله ما فريت إلّا جلدك
ولا حززت إلّا في لحمك.

وسترد على رسول الله
برغمك وعترته ولحمته
في حظيرة القدس يوم
يجمع الله شملهم ملمومين
من الشعث.

وهو قول الله تعالى ﴿ وَلاَ
تَحْسَبَنَّ ٱلَّذِينَ قُتِلُواْ فِي
سَبِيلِ ٱللَّهِ أَمْوَاتاً بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ
عِندَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ ﴿﴾﴾.

50 Qur'an, Āl ʿImrān 3:169.

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The man who put you in this place and gave you charge over believers' lives will learn his lesson.

The day will come when God will be your judge, Muḥammad will be your adversary, and your own limbs will bear witness against you. "What a terrible barter the oppressors get!"[51] [You will learn] "who gets the most terrible abode, and who has the weakest army."[52]

By God—O enemy of God and son of his enemy—I find your stature small and your oppression great.

But my eyes are full of tears, my breast burns with grief. And yet, that does nothing. For Ḥusayn has been killed.

And here, Satan's host has stood us before an assembly of fools, hoping to be rewarded from God's treasury for violating sanctities God has proclaimed.

Your hands drip with our blood. Your mouths foam from our flesh. As for those pure bodies—Alas! Wolves of the wild approach them in the gloom.

You treat us as booty to be plundered, but when the hour comes and you hold nothing except the deeds performed by your hands, you will find you have hoarded sin.

You will scream, "O son of Marjāna!" and he will scream for you. You, with your followers, will howl when you come to the celestial weighing scales, when you find that the best provision Muʿāwiya left to you was the act of killing Muḥammad's children!

By God, I fear no one but God, and I complain to no one but him.

Plot your plot, extend your effort, and wage your war! By God, the shame of what you have done to us can never be washed away!

I offer praise to God, who granted a felicitous culmination ornamented with his forgiveness to the chiefs of the youth of paradise, and stationed them in his garden. I ask God to raise their standing, and to grant them more and yet more of his favors. Truly, God is the most powerful of friends.

وسيعلم من بوّأك ومكّنك من رقاب المؤمنين.

إذا كان الحكم الله والخصم محمّد وجوارحك شاهدة عليك ﴿بِئْسَ لِلظَّالِمِيْنَ بَدَلًا﴾ ﴿أَيُّكُمْ شَرٌّ مَكَانًا وَأَضْعَفُ جُنْدًا﴾.

مع أنّي والله يا عدوّ الله وابن عدوّه أستصغر قدرك وأستعظم تقريعك.

غير أنّ العيون عبرى والصدور حرّى وما يجزي ذلك وما يغني عنّا وقد قتل الحسين.

وحزب الشيطان يقرّبنا إلى حزب السفهاء ليعطوهم أموال الله على انتهاك محارم الله.

فهذه الأيدي تنطف من دمائنا وهذه الأفواه تتحلّب من لحومنا وتلك الجثث الزواكي يعتامها عسلان الفلوات.

فلئن اتّخذتنا مغنمًا لتتّخذنّ مغرمًا حين لا تجد إلّا ما قدّمت يداك.

تستصرخ يابن مرجانة ويستصرخ بك وتتعاوى وأتباعك عند الميزان وقد وجدت أفضل زاد زوّدك معاوية قتلك ذريّة محمّد.

فوالله ما اتّقيت إلّا الله ولا شكواي إلّا إلى الله.

فكد كيدك واسع سعيك وناصب جهدك فوالله لا يرحض عنك عار ما أتيت إلينا أبدًا.

والحمد لله الّذي ختم بالسعادة والمغفرة لسادات شبّان الجنان فأوجب لهم الجنّة أسأل الله أن يرفع لهم الدرجات وأن يوجب لهم المزيد من فضله فإنّه وليّ قدير.

51 Qur'an, Kahf 18:50.

52 Qur'an, Maryam 19:75.

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Annotation

Zaynab begins her speech with a verse from the Qur'an (section 1): "God and his messenger spoke the truth, Yazīd, 'Evildoers obtain an evil end, for they reject God's signs and ridicule them.'" With such a beginning, she—like Umm Kulthūm earlier—grounds her arguments in the holy book of Islam. Her verbatim quotations—this one, and several more to come—are in addition to the many allusions to Qur'anic concepts throughout evoking its belief system of God's omnipotence and the eventual triumph of good over evil. Verbal aggression is even more visible in Zaynab's speech than her sister's. Unlike Umm Kulthūm whose audience was composed of the men and women of Kufa, Zaynab is addressing the Umayyad caliph Yazīd.[53] Compared to her sister's audience, who, though weak in resisting pressure to abandon support for Ḥusayn, still revere and love him, Zaynab is addressing a powerful Umayyad ruler who is a sworn enemy of the Hāshimid family of the Prophet, whose enmity stretches back several generations to the feud between their forebears Hāshim and Umayya. Where Umm Kulthūm stressed the Kufans' breaking of their pledge to Ḥusayn, Zaynab's examples highlight the futility of worldly power in the face of the Almighty's omnipotence. Zaynab, like Umm Kulthūm, uses metonymy, linking the Umayyads with past communities who opposed God's prophets. By citing this Qur'anic verse, she also suggests the previous uncited verse, which runs as follows:

> Have they never journeyed in the earth and seen what happened to those who lived before their time, who were stronger than them, cultivated the earth and built on it more widely than them? Their messengers brought them evidence of the truth. It was not God who wronged them, but it was they who wronged themselves.[54]

This uncited verse, which the audience would be expected to know and connect to, fills in the details and lays out more expansively the lead up to the pronouncement: "Evildoers obtain an evil end." Zaynab harnesses both to direct her powerful audience to the example of bygone peoples who maltreated God's messengers, who were all destroyed.

Next, she continues with a series of questions (section 2): "Do you think that because we have been driven as captive slaves, and forced to traverse the far reaches of the earth with no shelter but the sky, we are insignificant in God's eyes and you have honor? That all this happened because of your immense stature?" She means here the womenfolk from the family of the Prophet, and her questions are rhetorical, meant not to elicit information but to drive home her point, to show that Yazīd's earthly dominion and her own apparent helplessness are not the real measure of their worth. The questions are followed by an observation about Yazīd's demeanor (section 3): "You raise your nose and look about

53 Ibn A'tham, *Futūḥ*, 5:122, and Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 5:457, also record Zaynab's strong retort to the Umayyad governor Ibn Ziyād in Kufa and his response. Ibn Ziyād expressed anger, then his companion 'Amr ibn Ḥarīth al-Makhzūmī attempted to stop him from taking physical action by reminding him that women cannot be punished for what they say, and finally Ibn Ziyād exclaimed, "This is true courage. By my life, your [Zaynab's] father was a poet and brave!"

54 أَوَلَمْ يَسيرُواْ فِي ٱلْأَرْضِ فَيَنظُرُواْ كَيْفَ كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ ٱلَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِهِمْ كَانُوٓاْ أَشَدَّ مِنْهُمْ قُوَّةً وَأَثَارُواْ ٱلْأَرْضَ وَعَمَرُوهَآ أَكْثَرَ مِمَّا عَمَرُوهَا وَجَآءَتْهُمْ رُسُلُهُم بِٱلْبَيِّنَاتِ فَمَا كَانَ ٱللَّهُ لِيَظْلِمَهُمْ وَلَـٰكِن كَانُوٓاْ أَنفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ). Qur'an, Rūm 30:9.

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you gay and happy, seeing the whole world flocking to you and under your control." The second part of the line is a metaphor comparing the world to a flock of camels, a major manifestation of property and power in the seventh-century Arabian Peninsula, and a common lifeworld image in early Arabic poetry and oratory. The camel metaphor, in conjunction with the remark about Yazīd's deportment, vividly portray his glee at this moment that he sees as an occasion of triumph for the Umayyad clan. This statement about Yazīd's articulation of joy serves as a foil for the dire warning after it (section 4): "Truly, this is nothing but a respite and a lull"—terms harnessed earlier to the same purpose by Umm Kulthūm—"these are the few moments you can breathe before the punishment descends." The warning is endorsed by two verses from the Qur'an: "God says, 'Let not disbelievers think that our respite is a good thing for them. Indeed, we give them respite so that they may increase in trespass, and a shameful punishment awaits them.'" With this quotation, Zaynab again calls to mind past challengers of God who were given a respite, but whose punishment, when it came, was all the more severe. In her world view, Yazīd knows the Qur'anic stories of ʿĀd, Thamūd, Pharoah, and the enemies of Noah and their fates. He, too, will be crushed and destroyed as they were.

This early section of the oration (sections 1–4) conjures for us in full color the drama playing out at the Umayyad court. Zaynab stands prisoner in front of Yazīd, while he sits in all his pomp and potency on the caliphal throne, surrounded by guards and attendants, "raising his nose, and looking around gay and happy." Zaynab is totally in Yazīd's power. He has already killed Ḥusayn and many of her kin, and subjected her and her sisters and nieces to abject suffering. He could potentially do even more harm. But she is not beaten. Her words express conviction that she is on the side of truth, that there will be a reckoning for the oppressor, and that God is with her always.

In the next section of her speech, Zaynab chastises Yazīd for his dishonorable treatment of the Prophet's granddaughters (section 5): "Is it just, O freedmen's son, for you to veil your women and concubines, while you drive forward God's messenger's daughters thus ..." The word "freedmen" (*ṭulaqāʾ*) is a derogatory term referring to those of the Quraysh, including Yazīd's grandfather Abū Sufyān, who remained committed enemies of Islam until forced to capitulate upon Muḥammad's conquest of Mecca. On that day, instead of forcing them into captivity according to the standard practice in seventh-century Arabian warfare, Muḥammad pardoned them and granted them their freedom, saying, "You are freedmen."[55] The use of the term also sets up Zaynab's subsequent chastisement; this is how Yazīd is repaying Muḥammad's magnanimity.

Having referred to Yazīd's respectful veiling of his own womenfolk, Zaynab creates a stark contrast through a description of her own dishonored state and the state of her sisters, sisters-in-law, and nieces: "veils torn, grieving, voices hoarse with weeping, jolted by speeding camels, herded from town to town by rancorous enemies, unguarded and undefended, those near and far speaking to them directly, without shame." These lines

55 Ibn Hishām, *al-Sīra al-nabawiyya*, 4:35; Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 3:61; Ṣafwat, *Jamharat khuṭab al-ʿarab*, 1:154; see text and translation in Tahera Qutbuddin, "*Khuṭba*: The Evolution of Early Arabic Oration," in *Classical Arabic Humanities in Their Own Terms*, ed. B. Gruendler with M. Cooperson (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 229–30.

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explain further the terms she had brought in at the beginning of her speech (section 2), in which she referred to Yazīd's soldiers' "driving forth" (*sawq*) the high-born ladies of the Prophet's family as "captured slave women" (*asārā*). Ironically, it is Yazīd's public shaming of Zaynab that is the impetus for her public speech. It will be useful here to quote Suzanne Stetkevych, who explains this idea in relation to Khansā"s public, pre-Islamic lament for her fallen brother:

> It appears that for the class of "free" or "freeborn" women, that is, the kinswomen of the lords and warriors, puberty was marked by confinement and veiling (the inverse of the male liminal expulsion or "protection," which is the dominant sign of their elevated status throughout their lives. The protection or privacy (especially pudical) of free women set them in opposition, above all, to female captives and slaves, who were not secluded and veiled but rather defiled by every hand and eye... . Crucial to the argument at hand is that confinement and privacy thus constitute an expression of "purity" or, in ritual terms, aggregation; hence, to be expelled, unveiled, to appear or speak in public, is an expression of "defilement," of liminality. It is therefore only in the liminal (defiled/sacral) states of a kinsman's death or of warfare that the women of the warrior class have a public—and hence poetic—voice.[56]

Zaynab's speech is delivered in the era of Islam, in some ways removed from the ethos of pre-Islamic tribal warfare. But that is what makes her situation even more poignant for Muslims. The next two lines of her speech continue and explain the comparison between the respect accorded to the harem of the Umayyad ruler and the shame and misery he heaped on the daughters of the man he acknowledges as God's Prophet (section 6). Those lines contain a bitter explanation for the reason for their exposure, that they have "no male protector to shield them" and an exclamation, "how to stop those who stare at us with coveting and rancor, hatred and malice!" They could also be read as a direct reference to the incident reported with Ḥusayn's young daughter Fāṭima al-Kubrā, when a Syrian courtier asked Yazīd for her and Zaynab stepped forward to protect her honor.[57]

In the next segment of the speech, Zaynab reminds Yazīd that the forefathers he seeks to avenge were Muḥammad's bitter enemies. In direct response to his verses expressing happiness at Ḥusayn's death, she exclaims (section 7), "Do you dare to say, 'I wish that my venerable forefathers at the Battle of Badr had witnessed (Ḥusayn's killing)!'" At Badr, Ḥamza and ʿAlī, Muḥammad's uncle and cousin, had dueled and killed Yazīd's forebears, Shayba, ʿUtba, and Walīd. Yazīd's verses exult in his revenge killing of Muḥammad's grandson, and ʿAlī's son, Ḥusayn. Zaynab reminds Yazīd that he calls himself a Muslim, nay, caliph of the Muslims. He is supposed to be on Muḥammad's side. His killing of the Prophet's grandson constitutes a grave sin. Then, rebuking him for desecrating Ḥusayn's remains, she continues (section 8): "Do you dare to strike Abū ʿAbdallāh's teeth with your cane!" Abū ʿAbdallāh is Ḥusayn's filionymic, and since its use was a common way to reference individuals in that era, it does not appear to be of particular consequence. What

56 Suzanne P. Stetkevych, "The Obligations and Poetics of Gender: Women's Elegy and Blood Vengeance," in *The Mute Immortals Speak: Pre-Islamic Poetry and the Poetics of Ritual* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 165; Arabic terms removed.

57 Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Malhūf*, 218; ʿImād al-Dīn, *ʿUyūn al-akhbār,* 4:162–63.

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is significant is Zaynab's direct reference to Yazīd's action, and her dangerous challenge of it in this fraught situation. Zaynab is Ḥusayn's sister. Against great odds in Karbala, Ḥusayn fought his oppressors with sword and speech to the very end. Zaynab, a female, is not societally and religiously permitted to wield a weapon. But in these traumatic circumstances, she fights back with razor-sharp words.

Her harsh condemnation of Yazīd's action flows into a graphic yet pensive line (section 9): "But all this can happen, for you have picked the wound and extirpated the root by spilling the blood of the messenger's children, stars of the earth from the line of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib." The descriptive simile "stars of the earth," is the first and only line of direct, conventional praise in this oration for Ḥusayn and the men of the family who were martyred with him in Karbala. In terms of its later placement in the oration, and its ancillary placement in the statement, it comes almost as a secondary thought, as a fact that is known and acknowledged by everyone, and thus needs no stating. Their lineage is what is emphasized, or we could say reemphasized, here. Their pedigree—being "the messenger's children"—is fleshed out further in the phrase "from the line of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib" (Muḥammad's grandfather, whose brother and rival was ʿAbd Shams, Yazīd's forebear). This point speaks to the historically ongoing clan rivalry, which is at the center of this episode, having been set up by Yazīd himself in the verses of poetry he cited at the outset. Indeed, the linking of the simile and the lineage is also interesting: they are the stars of the earth because they possess this exalted genealogy.

Zaynab's recounting of Yazīd's crime leads up to a warning regarding the approaching reckoning. The speech began with the warning posed through the Qur'an quotation, "Evildoers obtain an evil end" (section 1). It posted admonitions along the way, saying this time was but a respite, with evocative Qur'anic verses describing the inevitable destruction of God's enemies (section 4). Building on those earlier pronouncements, she now makes the threat explicit, applying it directly to Yazīd (section 10): "But wait. Soon you too shall come before God, as they have done, and you will wish that you had been born blind and dumb, that you had never intoned, 'Praise God and shine forth in joy!'" In an orality-based agonistic mode similar to Umm Kulthūm's, she laces these lines of threat with intensifiers, the prefixed letter *L* and the doubled, suffixed letter *N* of emphasis (*nūn al-tawkīd al-thaqīla*), attached on both sides to the verbs *la-taridanna* and *la-tawaddanna*.

I have discussed earlier Umm Kulthūm's subversion of the pre-Islamic concept of tribal blood-vengeance, which she does by subordinating it to God's will. Zaynab professes the same attitude, interjected here in a line of prayer (section 11)—"God, grant us our rights, and give us vengeance from those who oppressed us"—where she places the onus of retribution in God's hands. The specifics of the next line (section 12)—"By God, you have pared naught but your own skin, incised naught but your own flesh"—are, in some reports, a response to Yazīd's command that Zaynab be whipped. This line forms a bridge to a different kind of juxtaposition. Earlier (section 2), Zaynab contrasted the dishonorable treatment Yazīd had meted out to the Prophet's family with the respect he had accorded to his own women. In this segment Zaynab declares to Yazīd that the tables will be turned on the oppressors, who will face eternal damnation in the hereafter, while Ḥusayn

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enjoys everlasting bliss in the shelter of his lord (section 13): "You shall come before God's messenger, despite yourself. His children, his family, will be with him in the garden." In this line again, the emphasis is on the fact that Ḥusayn is Muḥammad's grandson, and that Yazīd will have God's messenger to answer to on judgment day. Ḥusayn will be reunited with his grandfather, along with the rest of his beloved kin: "That day, God will bring them together, gathered after long separation."

The segment is capped in a by-now familiar manner with a Qur'anic verse (section 14): "Do not think that those killed in the path of God are dead. They are alive and sustained in their lord's presence." In its original context, the exegetes write that the verse extolled the Muslim martyrs of Badr and Uḥud, two of the earliest battles fought between the Muslims of Medina and the pagan Meccans. Zaynab's citation of the verse is particularly apt in the context of Yazīd's own references to those battles, through the satirical poetry of ʿAbdallāh ibn al-Zibaʿrā. Zaynab recalls the early Muslim martyrs of Badr and Uḥud by her citation of this Qur'anic verse, which, through its context, places her brother and the other martyrs of Karbala in that same high station.

Zaynab includes Yazīd's father Muʿāwiya in her condemnation, saying (section 15), "The man who put you in this place and gave you charge over the lives of believers will learn his lesson." The fact that she does not name Muʿāwiya, but rather characterizes him through his act of appointing Yazīd as caliph—an illegal appointment in her view—includes him more squarely in the culpability for the heinous deed committed by Yazīd that she is decrying. Moving from the general to the specific, Zaynab goes on to provide detail of what she paints as the scene of retribution (section 16): "The day will come when God will be your judge, Muḥammad will be your adversary, and your own limbs will bear witness against you." Since the reference is to judgment day, we see delineated here the four principles of a legal case: The judge is God, who is the most just of judges. The plaintiff is Muḥammad, who takes the place of his grandson Ḥusayn in condemning Yazīd. The defendant is Yazīd, whom Zaynab is castigating. And the witness against him his own limbs, a reference to the uncited Qur'anic verse that gives anthropomorphic voice to a sinner's body parts: "On that day their own tongues, hands and feet shall testify against them."[58]

She follows with two cited Qur'anic verses (section 17), the first of which is: "What a terrible barter the oppressors get!" The verse contains a trade metaphor common in the Qur'anic presentation of this world and the hereafter, and it echoes Zaynab's earlier line about Yazīd's glee at the world flocking to him like camels (section 3). With her Qur'anic rebuttal, she gives the lie to that unspoken expression of triumph, saying his barter—the transient worldly gain achieved through his oppression, in the face of the eternal retribution it would surely garner—was even in purely commercial terms a terrible transaction. The next verse she cites drives home his ultimate loss, stating that he would learn at that time "who gets the most terrible abode, and who has the weakest army." Strength, an important praise motif in the culture, is referenced from the back door. That day, Yazīd will find out he has "the weakest army," and no power to ward off the punishment that will come to him. The verses are capped with an expression of Zaynab's scorn for Yazīd's

58 (يَوْمَ تَشْهَدُ عَلَيْهِمْ أَلْسِنَتُهُمْ وَأَيْدِيهِمْ وَأَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ). Qur'an, Nūr 24:24.

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power, and her deeper and longer-term vision of the situation at hand, in a very personal statement (section 18): "By God—O enemy of God and son of his enemy—I find your stature small and your oppression great."

Here, the oration unexpectedly turns intensely introspective, giving us a glimpse into Zaynab's profound anguish at her loss and deep anger at Ḥusayn's killers. Zaynab had been with Ḥusayn through the entire episode of Karbala. She had experienced in person the lead-up to the event, and suffered through the violent deaths accorded to her sons, brothers, and nephews, one after another. In some reports, Zaynab even witnessed Ḥusayn's actual killing. Her distress, as expressed in the following lines, almost an aside addressed to herself, is extreme (section 19): "But my eyes are full of tears, my breast burns with grief." Tears are usually considered cathartic. In Arabic poetry, a famous line of Imruʾ al-Qays's (fl. sixth century ad) Muʿallaqa ode states, "I heal through the tears I shed."[59] Zaynab turns the healing motif on its head, saying (section 19), "and yet, that does nothing. For Ḥusayn has been killed." Presumably she means that tears will not bring him back. Perhaps she also means that nothing matters any more. The worst that could have happened has happened.

But coming back from the brink of despair, she continues her speech with renewed defiance in challenging Yazīd and calling out his crime (section 20): "And here, Satan's host has stood us before an assembly of fools, hoping to be rewarded from God's treasury for violating sanctities God has proclaimed." She characterizes both master and servants as godless: Those who participated in killing Ḥusayn are a greedy "Satan's host" and the Umayyad ruling party are an "assembly of fools" who have taken illegal control of the Islamic state purse, God's own treasury. She uses lupine imagery to condemn their villainy. Graphic depiction is a key feature of oral-society verbal expression, as I have mentioned earlier, and Zaynab's articulation is a particularly fierce example. The first two lines metaphorically reference animal predators, where Ḥusayn's killers are likened to wolves (section 21). "Your hands drip with our blood. Your mouths foam from our flesh." A literary precedent is the extended simile in the famous Ode in L attributed to the pre-Islamic brigand poet Shanfarā (d. ca. 550 AD), in which the poet metaphorically describes himself through his description of that animal. These brigands are themselves called in the tradition *ṣaʿālīk*, an archaic word often translated as wolves. In his poem, Shanfarā boasts of "widowing women and orphaning children," and he describes the wolves who are howling from hunger in the wilderness as his "brothers."[60] Zaynab's wolf metaphor echoes this image in a more direct manner. Her next line shifts into a literal representation, perhaps even more disconcerting, of the fearsome beasts menacing Ḥusayn and his slain companions after the killing: "As for those pure bodies—Alas! Wolves of the wild approach them in the gloom!"

59 (وإنّ شفائي عبرة مهراقة). al-Ḥusayn ibn Aḥmad al-Zawzanī, *Sharḥ al-Muʿallaqāt al-sabʿ* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Maʿārif, 1980), 14.

60 Ismāʿīl ibn. Qāsim Qālī, *Kitāb Dhayl al-Amālī wa-l-Nawādir wa-yalīhi Kitāb al-Nawādir* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1996), 203–6; Michael A. Sells, trans., *Desert Tracings: Six Classic Arabian Odes by ʿAlqama, Shanfara, Labīd, ʿAntara, Al-Aʿshā, and Dhu al-Rumma* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 24–30.

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In the penultimate section of the speech, Zaynab comes back to the earlier opening theme of how victim and oppressor stack up now and how the tables will be turned in the hereafter (sections 2–4). Coming full circle in a loose "ring-composition"—in Mary Douglas's definition, a construction of parallelisms that opens a theme, develops it, and rounds it off by bringing the conclusion back to the beginning[61]—Zaynab again highlights Yazīd's flawed judgment (section 22): "You treat us as booty to be plundered, but when the hour comes and you hold nothing but the deeds performed by your hands, you will find you have hoarded sin." Here, echoing the Qur'anic verse she had cited earlier on barter (section 17), Zaynab uses a series of interconnected property-related metaphors, one leading to the other. Deepening her condemnation of Yazīd's dishonoring of the Prophet's granddaughters, of his treatment of them as captive slaves, she takes the battle context further with the word booty (*maghnam*). This booty was already shown in a sinister light by its reference to humans—the granddaughters of the Prophet, no less—as chattel. Now, in the second metaphor, it morphs into evil deeds, which is what Yazīd will find he is left with on judgment day. In a third metaphor, these properties/deeds that he has "hoarded" are shown transforming into "sin" (*maghram*). The comparison is emphasized by a consonant rhyme in *M*, in these two morphologically equivalent words.

Nearing the end, the emotional register crescendos. Zaynab reinforces her earlier pronouncements about Yazīd's upcoming retribution on judgment day (sections 12–17) with a vivid dramatization depicting that scene (section 23): "You will scream, O son of Marjāna!, and he will scream for you." (The "son of Marjāna" is Yazīd's governor, Ibn Ziyād, who had orchestrated Ḥusayn's killing.) "You, with your followers, will howl when you come to the celestial weighing scales, when you find that the best provision Muʿāwiya left to you was the act of killing Muḥammad's children!" In the early Arabic oratorical corpus of which Zaynab's oration is part, dramatization of strategic scenes is a recurrent feature. The wolves who had earlier preyed on Ḥusayn (section 21) will "howl" (*tataʿāwā*) in pain and dread when their deeds are weighed by the stern judge. More direct and prosaic, the final pronouncement of Zaynab's oration again underlines its essential themes, viz., her reliance on God and disdain of Yazīd's power (section 24): "By God, I fear no one but God, and I complain to no one but him." She challenges him defiantly: "Plot your plot, extend your effort, and wage your war!" She ends the body of her address with a bitter forecast, echoing the language used by Umm Kulthūm to address the Kufans: "By God, the shame of what you have done to us can never be washed away!"

Zaynab concludes her oration with the standard closing formula of praise to God. Yet, the praise she offers—like her sister's paean earlier—is anything but formulaic. She uses it to declare that God's grace envelops Ḥusayn, channeling it into a final line of prayer for him:

> I offer praise to God, who granted a felicitous culmination ornamented with his forgiveness to the chiefs of the youth of paradise (Ḥasan and Ḥusayn), and stationed them in his garden.

61 Mary Douglas, *Thinking in Circles: An Essay on Ring Composition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), x, and passim.

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> I ask God to raise their standing, and to grant them more and yet more of his favors. Truly, God is the most powerful of friends.

With her concluding words, the protagonists' positions are fully inverted. The powerful ruler has become chained to his deeds, and the oppressed Imam and his family has attained the ultimate victory. This is the end of the oration. Ṭayfūr notes nothing further. Ibn Ṭāwūs remarks that many in Yazīd's court wept. Yazīd himself was silent.

"Flesh-Witnessing"

Zaynab's rendering of the events of Karbala, and her muzzling of any legal or moral defense by Yazīd, has to do with her status as witness to horrific events. To use Yuval Harari's terms, Zaynab (like Umm Kulthūm) is not just an eyewitness who has seen Ḥusayn's killing and the Karbala tragedy, but she is a "flesh-witness" who has suffered personally and intensely its physical and emotional travails. Harari distinguishes between the authority wielded by the two different types:

> Eyewitnessing and flesh-witnessing are very different types of authority which produce different types of narratives. Eyewitness narratives are interested in conveying "objective" facts and deserve to be called "eyewitness accounts" whenever their authors have directly witnessed the events they describe. In contrast, flesh-witness narratives seem to be interested in conveying experiences and may be considered "flesh-witness accounts" only if their authors have themselves undergone the described experiences. One can often be an eyewitness to an experience one has not undergone.[62]

Harari's setting of World War I is far removed from Zaynab's world in time, place, and cultural context. Moreover, Harari speaks of recorded eyewitness narratives while Zaynab's oration contains at least some quantity of later rhetorical construction. That said, and in spite of fundamental contextual differences, many of Harari's observations can be harnessed to our analysis of Zaynab's speech to Yazīd. She was personally involved in the battle she relates, and endured suffering that can never be fully understood by those who did not suffer in the same manner. Thus, she wields a subjective authority in narrating Karbala, which is germane to her silencing of Yazīd. Harari's further remarks on the nature and purpose of flesh-witnessing are instructive:

> Very often flesh-witnesses are possessed by their past experience. They are messengers speaking on behalf of countless others who did not live to tell the tale. The past experience and especially the dead victims of that experience thrust upon survivors a sacred and often unwanted burden of changing the world. Narrating the experience is their way of gaining the power necessary to change the world. In this, flesh-witnesses again resemble religious visionaries and prophets who are possessed by some transcendent power and who speak—often against their will—in order to change the world rather than merely to transmit information.[63]

62 Yuval Noah Harari, "Scholars, Eyewitnesses, and Flesh-Witnesses of War: A Tense Relationship," *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 7, no. 2 (2009): 221.

63 Harari, "Scholars, Eyewitnesses, and Flesh-Witnesses of War," 222.

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Just as flesh-witnesses carry a "sacred burden of changing the world thrust on them by the dead," Ḥusayn has departed the world but his sister, a flesh-witness to his courageous stance in the face of Yazīd's oppression, continues to carry his banner. In the oration attributed to Zaynab, the Battle of Karbala is over, but the fight for truth and justice will never end.

Key Tools of Persuasion: Quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith and Rhetorical Questions

Rhetorical tools employed especially intensively in these orations by Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm, perhaps more so than in most orations by males, are quotations from sacred texts and rhetorical questions. In oral substrate, and subsequently in style and structure, orations by women of the early Islamic period are similar to those by men. They are rhythmic and graphic, cite testamentary materials, and contain profuse audience-engagement features and emphatic constructions. They maintain a formal and eloquent linguistic register. They follow the regular sequence of segments, with a formulaic praise opening, a transition phrase, a vocative address to the audience, various themes in the body of the oration, and a capstone ending of prayer. However, in context and theme, women's orations are starkly different. Pious counsel, battle matters, and political topics form the fabric of men's orations in the period. In the female variety, these same concerns march to a different beat, largely because the women orators who voice them argue from a seat of victimization and defiance in face of the political authority. In their speeches, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm rely on the authority of the Qur'an, and on a reality the audience cannot deny, in order to make their point.

References to divine justice and power constitute these orations' first major tool of argument. With Qur'an and hadith quotations, formulaic and thematic allusions to God, and historical references to the godly life of his Prophet Muḥammad, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm profess their own and their martyred brother's righteousness, and the heinousness of Yazīd's crime and the Kufans' perfidy. Beginning their orations with the name of God and his messenger, and referring to them over and over, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm link themselves to those higher powers, and imply divine endorsement of their words. The holy texts they cite throughout underscore their claims.[64] Some quotations are direct, while others are modified to the context, often with the pronoun of the verse changed to apply directly to the addressees.[65] Whether direct or indirect, these proof texts

64 Qur'an citation is common in Muslim orations from the earliest period of Islam. For an assessment of its testimonial function in the early oration, see Tahera Qutbuddin, "Qur'an Citation in Early Arabic Oration (*khuṭba*): Mnemonic, Liturgical and Testimonial Functions," in *The Qur'an and* Adab*: The Shaping of Literary Traditions in Classical Islam,* ed. N. Alshaar (Oxford: Oxford University Press in association with the Institute of Ismaili Studies, Qur'anic Studies Series, 2017), 322–31. For its political use in the orations of the Umayyad governor Ḥajjāj, see Ibrahim al-Jomaih, "The Use of the Qur'an in Political Argument: A Study of Early Islamic Parties (35–86 AH/656–705 AD)" (PhD diss., UCLA, 1988), 42–48. Al-Jomaih and others have written about modes of Qur'an citation in epistles and other written texts.

65 See Husain K. B. Qutbuddin's theoretically argued classification of eight types of Qur'an quotations in "A Framework for an Ismā'īlī Fāṭimid Commentary of the Qur'ān" (PhD diss., University

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are metonymical. They evoke the salvation history expounded in the Qur'an in which those who challenge God and his prophets, generation after generation, are never beyond the reach of his power; they are ultimately punished with crushing retribution. Moreover, the verses imply that all Muslims—if they accept the Qur'an—should accept what they were saying. By alluding to the hadith, which proclaims Ḥusayn as "chief of the youth of paradise," they further bolster the profession of his godliness, and, by inference, the godlessness of his killers. Ending with the name of God—Zaynab with formulaic praise, and Umm Kulthūm with verses from the Qur'an—they retroactively infuse their text with divine authority.

The assertions Umm Kulthūm makes about the Kufans' betrayal of Ḥusayn, about their tears not compensating for their abhorrent action in killing him, are the second major tool of persuasion, powerful because the Kufans cannot refute any part of them. They had pledged allegiance to Ḥusayn, then turned around and participated in his killing. They can only weep more profusely in response. Similarly, Zaynab's questions compel Yazīd to acknowledge Ḥusayn's high stature and his female relatives' sanctity. In the framework of her rhetoric, he cannot deny that Ḥusayn is the Prophet's grandson, Zaynab the Prophet's granddaughter, and his own forebears the Prophet's fierce enemies. The vivid contrast Zaynab draws between her family's service to Islam and Yazīd's family's disservice to it brings the past into the present, connecting her with her family's virtue and him with his family's depravity.

Concluding Remarks: Comparing the Effect of Martyrdom in Women's Orations and Women's Poetry

In pre-Islamic poetry, ritual mourning of a brother looms large. As mentioned in passing earlier, Khansā', perhaps the most celebrated female poet in all of Arabic literature, is credited with a set of elegies mourning her brothers, her protectors and providers, who had fallen in battle. Khansā' mourns especially her brother Ṣakhr. In her presentation, he is a glorious warrior, whose generosity and valor are unparalleled. The purpose of her poems is twofold: They serve as catharsis, the unceasingly flowing tears they solicit in their openings—e.g., "Eyes, be generous" (*ʿaynayya jūdā*)[66]—heal her enormous pain. At the same time, they urge the warriors of the tribe to pick up their swords and avenge him. Tears and blood commingle, each in turn prompting the other: Ṣakhr's shed blood calls forth Khansā''s tears, and Khansā''s tears, in turn, demand that Ṣakhr's killers' blood be shed. Another rare female Arabic poet from the Umayyad period named Laylā l-Akhyaliyya (d. ca. 85/704) also mourns in verse her lover Tawba, who has fallen in battle, and she follows the conventions set by Khansā'.[67] In her perceptive study cited earlier, Stetkevych argues that the preponderance of pre-Islamic lament poetry celebrates warriors who fell in

of Cambridge, 2009), 56–89. He deconstructs the ad hoc approach to categorizing Qur'an citation used by modern scholars, and describes a series of steps to be followed for excavating meaning.

66 Khansā', *Dīwān al-Khansā'*, ed. Ḥ. Ṭammās (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 2003), 31. See similar openings on 12, 17 18, 21, 24, 25, and passim.

67 Laylā l-Akhyaliyya, *Dīwān Laylā l-Akhyaliyya*, ed. Kh. I. al-ʿAṭiyya and J. al-ʿAṭiyya (Baghdad: Wizārat al-Thaqāfa wa-l-Irshād Silsilat Kutub al-Turāth, n.d.), 64–66, 68, 71–74.

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battle. She further argues that it is "concerned more with ritual obligation than personal expression."[68]

Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm's speeches reflect some aspects of this cultural ethos: they mourn their slain brother; their mode of lament is an artistic verbal performance; lineage is a key component of their praise; Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm speak unveiled in public in a situation of distress; they reference tears and blood; and they express a wish for the vengeance. But they also break away from the pre-Islamic lament in important ways. The qualities they praise in their slain brother are different: virtue, spiritual eminence, righteous leadership, and his relationship with the Prophet of Islam. The weeping is not a ritual obligation, but a personal expression. The vengeance they seek is solicited from God, not humans. Their unveiling is not of their own choice, but a shame brought on them by their captors. Their public speaking, too, is forced on them by circumstances visited by the enemy, not a ritual prompted by the tribe.

In the aftermath of the trauma of Karbala, Zaynab and Umm Kulthūm break the society-imposed silence by constructing a potent, personal voice that relies on prophetic lineage, Qur'anic authorization, and the context of martyrdom, rather than tribal ritual and temporal might. Their language conveys their strong conviction that God is on their side, and that there will be a reckoning for the tyrant who has killed their family and dishonored them. Echoing the arguments and emotions expressed by Ḥusayn himself in Karbala, their gender allows them to speak in their fraught situation when their male relatives have been silenced by the sword.

68 Stetkevych, "The Obligations and Poetics of Gender," 166 and passim. A similar reversal of voice is remarked in funeral laments of other societies, such as the Chinese Hakka of Hong Kong, studied by Elizabeth L. Johnson, "Grieving for the Dead, Grieving for the Living: Funeral Laments of Hakka Women," in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China*, ed. J. L. Watson and E. S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 141: "During a funeral in Kwan Mun Hau [a district of Hong Kong], priests and lineage leaders speak. Male mourners, however, keep silent. These men, who normally speak in public and control public activities, must be silent and relinquish all control to others. They also do not express themselves through lamentation, although they may weep silently. Women, who are normally expected to be quiet on formal occasions and who follow the orders of men, are permitted to express themselves, giving vent to their personal feelings."

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